

Rethinking Critical Pedagogy and the Gramscian and Freirean Legacies:

# From Organic to Committed Intellectuals or Critical Pedagogy, Commitment, and Praxis

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*Critical pedagogy problematizes the relationship between education and politics, between sociopolitical relations and pedagogical practices, between the reproduction of dependent hierarchies of power and privilege in the domain of everyday social life and that of classrooms and institutions. In doing so, it advances an agenda for educational transformation by encouraging educators to understand the sociopolitical contexts of educative acts and the importance of radically democratizing both educational sites and larger social formations. In such processes, educators take on intellectual roles by adapting to, resisting, and challenging curriculum, school policy, educational philosophies, and pedagogical traditions. This article revisits the contributions of **Antonio Gramsci** and **Paulo Freire** to critical pedagogy, giving particular attention to the related concepts of hegemony and the intellectual.*

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## Points of Departure

One of the now commonplace claims of critical pedagogy during its nearly 30-year history in the United States is that both the failures and successes of education are constructed in and through people's linguistic, cultural, social, and behavioral interactions, which are constrained and enabled by social relations of production and dominant cultural formations, ideological apparatuses, and institutional practices (Heras, 1999). These interactions are also shaped by the ways in which members of specific social groups understand, perceive, and act in, through, and on reality. For educators who work within the tradition of critical pedagogy, it is not enough to understand any given educational reality; there is a pedagogical mandate to transform it with the goal of radically democratizing educational sites and

societies through a shared praxis. By emphasizing the importance of understanding and transforming pedagogical and social realities, it also points to the intrinsic relationship between education and the production and reproduction of labor-power.

A central and related aspect of critical pedagogy is the role of educators in the process of educational critique. Henry Giroux (1993) has described educators as “transformative intellectuals” because they take a critical stance toward their own practice and the practice of others to engage in debate and inquiry. In doing so, educators become active in shaping the curriculum, having a role in shaping school policy, defining educational philosophies, and working with their communities in diverse capacities. Transformative intellectuals are aware of their own theoretical convictions and are skilled in strategies for translating them into practice (Giroux, 1993, 2002). Giroux builds here on the Gramscian concept of praxis, or theoretically oriented action, and that of the intellectual, who has a prominent role to play in promoting an agenda for change.

Giroux’s perspective presents several ideas and notions that are widely embraced by those associated with critical pedagogy. The social and political dimensions of schooling, the need to understand and transform schools and society, and the key role that educators in these processes play are core themes shared by many critical educators. Although it is hard to quantify or even qualify the influence of critical pedagogues in North America, it would be hard to deny that as a collective movement it has produced one of the most dynamic and controversial educational schools of thought of the past 30 years.

The main goal of this article is to revisit the contributions of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire to the foundational concept of ideology and related concepts of hegemony and the intellectual, with the aim of rethinking critical pedagogy and the notion of teachers as transformative intellectuals. It is our intention to rethink Gramsci’s and Freire’s contributions in a way that will be consistent with Borg and Mayo’s (2002) warning against “scriptural readings” of texts.

We will argue that one of the advantages of using Gramsci’s and Freire’s framework in the complex task of rethinking critical pedagogy is that both authors made a vital departure from the concept of ideology as an inert compendium of static and agreed-on ideas to the concept of ideology as embodied, lived, and dynamic sets of social practices. In this conceptualization, ideologies connected to a broader system of intelligibility linked to the cultural logic of capitalism contribute to the development of hegemonic relations and regimes and are dialectically co-constructed by individuals and the social classes, groups, and institutions of which they are a part.

## Points of Departure I: Ideology and Hegemony

To grasp the complex relationship between ideology and hegemony, both constructs need to be seen as parallax relations, that is, from the perspective of the social agent at the present moment, with the understanding that this site of enunciation is in itself dialectically conditioned by this interplay. For Gramsci, a dominant class or class alliance necessarily requires two forms of control—coercion (sustained by politically regulated repression) and consent—in order to achieve hegemonic status. These forms of control function catalytically as allied practices that stipulate an ethical dimension tied to the forces of production. According to Gramsci,

‘every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces of development, and hence to the interest of the ruling classes. The school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in this sense. (p. 258)’

Hegemonic relationships not only play an ethical role but also a pedagogical one. Gramsci (1971) made it clear that “every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relationship” (p. 350) because

‘a class is dominant in two ways, i.e., ‘leading’ and ‘dominant’. It leads the classes which are allies, and dominates those which are its enemies. One should not count solely on the power and material force which such position gives in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony. (p. 57)’

As a Marxist intellectual, Gramsci (1971) never failed to stress the importance of economic relations, insisting that the economy determines, in the last instance, the nature, type, and reach of the compromises and agreements that can be achieved among the dominant groups and the popular sectors. He further clarifies this point as follows:

‘It is undoubtedly the fact that hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that

such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity. (p. 161)'

However, the notion of hegemonic rule was not well developed in Gramsci (Borg, Buttiegieg,&Mayo, 2002).Walter Adamson (1980) notes that the relationship between hegemony, state power, and forms of political legitimization was at times ambiguous and used in several different (and sometimes contradictory) senses:

'It is used, first of all, in a morally neutral and instrumental sense to characterize those bourgeois regimes that have proved capable of organizing mass consent effectively. But it is also used in an essentially ethical sense to characterize the functioning of a proletarian regulated society. Here is another instance in which the attempt to incorporate Machiavellian and ethical state traditions raises perplexing and unresolved questions. Is the sort of consent being obtained the same in both cases? Or is consent in a bourgeois hegemony somehow passive and noncritical, while under proletarian auspices it would be active, participatory, and philosophical? If so, what more fully is the institutional basis of this latter sort of control? (p. 242)'

We find that the Gramscian dichotomy of force and consent is not nearly sufficient or comprehensive enough to allow us to examine the complex character of hegemonic rule because these two terms do not permit a detailed analysis of the nuances and forms of political legitimization. Consequently, it makes more sense to view the terms *force* and *consent* in Adamson's (1980) terms: as "endpoints of a continuum that includes such intermediate positions as constraint (e.g., fear of unemployment), co-optation, and perhaps even Arendt's category of 'authority'" (p. 243).

In our view, Gramsci's (1971) work can help us in understanding the class contradictions that structure the subjectivities and self-activity (agency) of oppressed classes with the understanding that hegemony does not take place in an indeterminate terrain (Katz, 1997). In light of Gramsci's work, there is a need to understand the overdetermination of self-activity and subjective agency by larger structures of capitalist social relations within the global division of labor (especially in the context of a restructured labor demand). The concept of hegemony that is articulated by many post-Marxists is often recognized as a type of *trompe d'oeil* whereby forces of domination are willfully underrecognized as the structured equanimity of inevitability, chance, or irreversible fate. Historically, variable structural determinants of action are either detached from cultural formations and

social practices or flatly ignored. Built into a number of theories of hegemony is the notion of the reversibility of cultural formations within specified conjunctures, as if such articulatory practices were asocial or ahistorical or otherwise severed from the chains of class determination. According to Katz (1997), this is clearly a misunderstanding of Gramsci and omits the entire problem of domination. Misappropriations of Gramsci's work (especially with the "radical democracy" school) have effectively caused domination to hemorrhage into a pool of relational negotiations in which certain ideological positions are won through consent. Here, we need to be reminded that intellectuals themselves are always the products of new forms of collective labor power brought about and consolidated by the forces of production.

Whereas Gramsci (1971) often stressed as a defining attribute the spirit or the will, Marx gave pride of place to production. Gramsci emphasized human consciousness as a defining attribute of humanity. Consciousness, akin to spirit, was linked to the notion of history as a form of becoming. Organized will becomes the basis of his philosophy. Although Gramsci acknowledges the link between humanity and production, he does not sufficiently emphasize the most important aspect of humanity's "complex of social relations": the satisfaction of human needs and the human necessity to produce (Hoffman, 1984). The satisfaction of human needs is the primary historical act and must be accomplished before men and women are in the position to make history. The human necessity to produce and reproduce thus underwrites all social relationships. For Gramsci, humanity is defined by concrete will, will plus historical circumstances, whereas for Marx, humanity is a response to and product of social and historical circumstances that are not primarily dependent on human will. Human relationships thus exist independently of the way in which people understand them. "Classical Marxism examined closely the repressive function of the class state, whereas Gramsci stressed the integrative function" (Brosio, 1994, p. 50).

The focus on the integrative function of the state is perhaps the key to understanding why, as Terry Eagleton (1991) maintains, Gramsci associates hegemony with the arena of civil society. This term is used by the Italian revolutionary to indicate a wide range of institutions that serve as intermediaries between the state and the economy: the church, schools, the press, the family, hospitals, political parties, and so on. We agree with John Holst (2002) that many leftist scholars have uncritically adopted a civil societarian view of Gramsci, underestimating Gramsci's attempt to connect civil society to the state. Here, we disagree fundamentally with the strict civil societarian view of Gramsci because Gramsci clearly saw civil society as part of the state. Both were "located in the superstructure that for Marxism has always been the domain of the state in the hands of the ruling class" (Holst, 2002, p. 106). Because Gramsci identified civil

society as an arena used by the ruling class to exert its hegemony over the society, the struggle for Gramsci was not to transform civil society but rather, as Holst points out, “to build proletarian hegemony” (p. 106).

For our own purposes, it should be stressed that hegemony is as much related to antagonistic processes as it is to consensual individual and social practices of negotiation and/or exchanges that take place not only in the realm of the civil society but also in the everyday actions of families, the state, and the various political arenas. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1986) argue that the concept of hegemony was originally tied to “an essentialist logic” in which only one authentic historical subject, “the working class,” was able to develop truly counterhegemonic policies and practices. In their view, such a logic, rather than advancing the project of social change and social justice, covered over and obstructed multiple forms of struggle developed by several groups and social movements (e.g., those developed by indigenous peoples, ethnic groups, women, ecologists, human rights activists), which could not be reduced to or categorized according to the exclusive basis of the class position of their members. However, instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, Laclau and Mouffe propose to free the concept of hegemony of any kind of essentialism and reappropriate the potentially emancipatory characteristics of the concept. Best and Kellner (1991) maintain that for Laclau and Mouffe,

‘hegemony entails a detotalizing logic of articulation and contingency that refuses the conception of the *a priori* unity or the progressive character of the working class or any other subject position. Rather, cultural and political identities are never given in advance, but must be constituted or articulated, from diverse elements. (p. 195)’

Similar to the position articulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1986), Stuart Hall (1996; Hall & Donald, 1986) situates the Gramscian challenge as the struggle for a new social order. Hall’s use of the term *articulation* is presented as a theoretically fecund means by which the double emphasis of Gramsci—that is, the emphasis on culture and structure, on ideology and material social relations—may be joined. What this double movement through the concept of articulation has achieved has been to conceptualize class and cultural struggles as interwoven and richly articulated (we will provide a critique of Hall’s concept of articulation later in our discussion).

According to this formulation, groups and classes exist in a shifting and mediated relationship, in a structured field of complex relations and ideological forces stitched together out of social fragments and privileging hierarchies, in structured asymmetries of power, in contending vectors of influence, and in emergent, contingent alliances. When one examines ideology, one must not look for smooth

lines of articulation or a set of seamless canonical ideas, but rather a regime of culture existing as a palimpsest of emergent and residual discourses. Hall's (1996) eloquent position on this issue is worth quoting at length:

'Gramsci always insisted that hegemony is not exclusively an ideological phenomenon. There can be no hegemony without "the decisive nucleus of the economic." On the other hand, do not fall into the trap of the old mechanical economism and believe that if you can only get hold of the economy, you can move the rest of life. The nature of power in the modern world is that it is also constructed in relation to political, moral, intellectual, cultural, ideological and sexual questions. The question of hegemony is always the question of a new cultural order. The question which faced Gramsci in relation to Italy faces us now in relation to Britain: what is the nature of this new civilization? Hegemony is not a state of grace which is installed forever. It's not a formation which incorporates everybody. The notion of a "historical bloc" is precisely different from that of a pacified, homogeneous, ruling class. It entails a quite different conception of how social forces and movements, in their diversity, can be articulated into strategic alliances. To construct a new cultural order, you need not to reflect an already-formed collective will, but to fashion a new one, to inaugurate a new historical project. (p. 170)'

Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe (1986) have developed a conception of hegemony as an ever-evolving set of political, economic, ideological, and cultural processes by which the dominant social sectors (or hegemonic bloc) elicit consent from the popular sectors. And yet hegemony is inseparable from conflicts and struggles over it. In this process, the struggle for control over the symbolic and economic domains of any given society and the role the state plays in such struggles cannot be diminished. The problem with the view of hegemony articulated by Laclau, Mouffe, and Hall is that in their emphasis, to distance themselves from what they consider to be a crude economism, they often seriously neglected the fundamental social contradiction between capital and labor and resecured the prohibitions on challenging the contradictions of capitalism while at the same time positing cultural struggles associated with changes in the mode of accumulation, exchange, and circulation of capital as superordinate over material relations of exploitation linked to production (i.e., to the extraction of surplus labor from workers who have nothing else to sell but their capacity to labor, their labor power).

Richard Brosio (1994) highlights Gramsci's realization "that hegemony must be ultimately anchored in economic strength—and ultimately physical power" (p. 48). Brosio also reminds us that although the state uses a combination of force and

consent to maintain hegemony, it is important not to forget “that the exercise and maintenance of hegemony over subaltern groups is still a variation of class struggle” (p.50). Brosio further cautions us not to forget the relationship of power to the educative aspects of hegemony:

‘There is a tendency to stress Gramsci’s important development of hegemony, the role of persuasion and consent, the seemingly willing participation by subaltern groups in their own domination; however, he was not naive about the relationship of power to this persuasive hegemony. (p. 49)’

The characteristics of consent and coercion that underwrite Gramsci’s model of hegemonic domination are fundamentally dynamic categories. Because they are dynamic rather than static relationships, they admit the possibility of rearticulation into counterhegemonic practices. We must not forget Gramsci’s (1971) firm conviction “that ordinary men and women could be educated into understanding the coercive and persuasive power of capitalist hegemony over them” (pp. 49-50). And this means acknowledging the roots of capitalist exploitation as located within the extraction of surplus value from the surplus labor of workers by owners and the potential for resistance that resides with workers on whom the system of capital depends (even in the technology-driven world of the so-called information economy that supposedly thrives on “immaterial” labor).

### **Points of Departure II: Resistance, Agency, and the Organic Intellectual**

The distinctive presence of the notions of collective will and consciousness in Gramsci’s work are closely related to his concepts of resistance and agency. Gramsci described resistance as largely passive and unconscious and suggested that as any political movement develops, agency replaces resistance:

‘If yesterday the subaltern element was a thing, today it is no longer a thing but a historical person, a protagonist; if yesterday it was not responsible because “resisting” a will external to itself, now it feels itself to be responsible because it is no longer resisting but an agent, necessarily active and taking the initiative. But was it ever mere “resistance”, a mere “thing”, mere “non-responsibility”? Certainly not. (p. 337)’

Gramsci (1971) also argued that some intellectuals, particularly those who could be described as traditional, mistakenly understand the popular sectors as merely agents who resist hegemonic processes and who “don’t even expect that the subaltern will become directive and responsible” (p. 337). Gramsci deeply



understood the importance of the articulation of knowledge with passion and commitment, evidenced in the following remarks:

‘the intellectual’s error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge): in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated—i.e. knowledge. (p. 418)’

For Gramsci, resistance was a sign of (subaltern) discontent rather than a conscious effort to promote social change. An immediate question uncoils: How is it possible to turn mere resistance into agency? The organic intellectual (specialized intellectuals each class develops) was Gramsci’s answer.

Gramsci (1971) took up the challenge of articulating the extent to which the working class could generate its own intellectual force, building on his well known conviction that “all men are intellectuals . . . but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (p. 9). His solution, the “organic intellectual,” took a collective character within a working-class social formation in which the role of theory was organically linked with the ebb and flow of daily proletarian life. In this view, intellectuals should become an elaborate, historical expression of traditions, culture, values, and social relations. As Boggs (1984) notes, quasi-Jacobin ideological functions were still important intellectual tasks but now were required to be centered within the proletarian milieu (factories, community life, and culture). In this respect, intellectuals would be organic to that milieu only if they were fully immersed in its culture and language. Intellectuals therefore carried out universal functions that situated social activity within local and specific class struggles and in the defense of class interests. In effect, Gramsci was able to overcome conceptual positions based on a mechanical separation between the intellectual and popular realms, a position clearly demonstrated in the following commentary:

‘the popular element “feels” but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element “knows” but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other. Not that the pedant cannot be impassioned; far from it. Impassioned pedantry is every bit as ridiculous and dangerous as wildest

sectarianism and demagoguery. . . . One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without the sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationship of purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood. (p. 418)'

Gramsci, like Paulo Freire years later, urged intellectuals to develop a relational knowledge of and with the masses to help them become self-reflective. His unsurpassed understanding of the relationship between theory and practice stipulated an active participation in their social quotidian struggles and an investment in their future well-being. Hence, Gramsci (1971) urged intellectuals to live their intellectual lives in a state of ongoing praxis:

'The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator. (p. 10)'

Gramsci (1971) believed that intellectuals need to develop not only intellectual capital to engage with and on behalf of the masses but the social capital of trust and collective will necessary to bring about community-based liberatory praxis. Gramsci was constantly preoccupied by a concern that popular revolt would be absorbed into the prevailing hegemony or else mobilized into the direction of reactionary fascism.

Gramsci (1971) did not believe, like the anarchists and syndicalists of his day, that mass consciousness, or common sense, was innately rebellious. For Gramsci, mass consciousness was contradictory and rather formless by necessity, and the construction of a collective political will was always gradual and uneven and part of a counterhegemonic movement in which intellectuals play an increasingly important role. The challenge for Gramsci "was how to move beyond social immediacy without at the same time destroying spontaneous impulses" (pp. 40-41) so that common sense became good sense and spontaneity was transformed into critical consciousness.

### **Points of Departure III: From Organic to Committed Intellectuals**

Working-class organic intellectuals were, for Gramsci, a fundamentally important expression of working-class life, critical agents that serve as vehicles for interrogating emergent patterns of thought and action, radicalizing subaltern groups, translating theory into strategy, and creating revolutionary subjectivity

through the formation of continuous and multifaceted counterhegemonic activity and the development of a revolutionary historical bloc where divergent interests converge and coalesce around shared visions and objectives.

Although Gramsci (1971, p. 258) considered all individuals to be intellectuals, not all of them held positions or fulfilled the functions traditionally assigned to and developed by intellectuals. Most importantly for Gramsci, organic intellectuals of the working class not only resist hegemonic processes, but they also attempt to displace the old hegemonic order by leading their class or popular front into more elaborate forms of understanding capital's incessant drive for self-expansion, the antagonistic relation between labor and capital, and the political and ideological process of class rule. At the same time, organic intellectuals serve as role models who open the horizons of their class or popular front to secure a more equitable system of societal organization, which Gramsci believed must take the form of a socialist society that is committed to uprooting value production and breaking from capital's pernicious logic.

The role of the organic intellectual was to mediate between the good sense of subaltern groups and the formation of a counterhegemonic consciousness that can read the contextually specific and historically conjunctural contradictions inherent in society. According to Carroll and Ratner (1994), Gramsci

'held that all people are intellectuals in capacity, if not function. He believed that counter-hegemonic leadership emanates from intellectuals whose organic ties to subaltern groups enable them to achieve a unity of theory and practice and of thinking and feeling, thus mediating between the abstract and concrete in a manner foreign to traditional scholastic, ecclesiastic, and political elites. For Gramsci, the role of the intellectual is that of organizer and facilitator: instead of bringing correct consciousness to the masses "from without," the organic intellectual facilitates the practical movement from "good sense" (which resistant subordinates already possess) to a broader, counter-hegemonic consciousness that is sensitive to the specific conditions of a social formation at a given conjuncture. (p. 12)'

In the search for the limits of what it means to be an intellectual, there exists among some scholars a lucid mistrustfulness of Gramsci's (1971) materialism. These scholars focus on Gramsci's concern with the intellectual function rather than on the function of the intellectual. As Ernesto Laclau (1990) has pointed out,

'the intellectual for Gramsci is not a segregated intellectual group but one that establishes the organic unity among a group of activities that, if left

to themselves, would remain fragmented and dispersed. A union activist, in that sense, would be an intellectual. (p. 204)'

Laclau (1990) emphasizes, however, that the process of building organic unity is not about the function of the intellectual but about the intellectual function. It is not focused on a class, nor can it be the exclusive preserve of an elite. Rather, it has the potential of emerging at all points of any social network: churches, hospitals, court houses, schools, and street corners; and once we accept the intellectual task as a function, does it matter who these intellectuals are and what their specific function in the larger social totality happens to be? Does it matter if they are priests, physicians, notaries, lawyers, teachers, nurses, dropouts, or gang members?

For Gramsci (1971), and also for Paulo Freire, political pedagogical actions are not an exclusive function of having the right knowledge but also of faithfulness to the event, in other words, of being in the right place at the right time. Is this a popular expression of the rejection of intellectual tasks? Not necessarily. This understanding deals with the ethical privilege of "being there" over "being something." By focusing on the relationships developed through hegemonic and counterhegemonic modalities, Gramsci highlighted the paradoxical practices in which the popular sectors engage, and he shows only one way out of this paradox. If society is to become democratic, the organic intellectuals of the popular classes must possess both knowledge of the problems facing them as well as practical solutions to those problems.

Gramsci (1971) saw democracy as essentially a dialectical movement between individual agency and structural location:

'But democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every "citizen" can "govern" and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this. Political democracy tends towards a coincidence of the rulers and the ruled (in the sense of government with the consent of the governed) ensuring for each non-ruler a free training in the skill and general technical preparation necessary to that end. (pp. 40-41)'

On one hand, Gramsci (1971) believed that the working class and the peasants (i.e., popular classes) are the only real determinant historical subjects that are able to effectively resist, challenge, and transform the hegemonic position of the bourgeoisie even though the popular classes have developed a contradictory consciousness that ultimately does not allow the elaboration of autonomous decisions or choices. On the other hand, organic intellectuals, on their own merits, are able to construct other models of consciousness in political and cultural arenas,

and it is this process that, for Gramsci, constitutes the key to overcoming the shortcomings of these popular classes:

‘Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the construction of an *elite* of intellectuals. A human mass does not “distinguish” itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of “specialized” in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. (p. 334)’

One of the main challenges of Gramsci’s (1971) framework, and one that is repeated by many in the field of education, is that of contesting the supposed categorical assumption that organic intellectuals must develop some sort of supranatural level of consciousness, avoiding or overcoming the contradictory personal and social struggles present in everyday life. At the same time, this valorization of the role of one small group of leaders and organizers replicates the heroic myths of romantic idealism of the past century, which in turn reflects its positivistic heritage, and a firm belief in the existence of a normal and teleological line of progress for all societies (i.e., from backward societies to capitalistic forms to socialist and finally communist societies).

#### **Points of Departure IV: Critical Pedagogy, Commitment, and Praxis**

Although we agree with Carl Boggs (1993) that today’s critical intellectuals also embody some elements of Gramsci’s (1971) organic model, we are concerned about the lack of interest in class politics and class struggle on the part of the emerging strata of postmodern intellectuals and their relationship to new social movements, including movements on a global scale. We further believe that Gramsci’s appropriation by educational postmodernists has too often emphasized the priority of language and representation in the hegemonic processes of identity formation to the detriment of acknowledging how the social construction of race, class, and gender are implicated in the international division of labor. Postmodern educators have not sufficiently comprehended the importance of understanding and challenging the totalizing power of capitalism. Capitalism totalizes like nothing else; it is its totalizing character that renders capitalism unique (Carroll & Ratner, 1994). According to Marx (1983),

‘it is not values in use and the enjoyment of them, but exchange value and its augmentation, that spur [the capitalist] into action. Fanatically

bent on making value expand itself, he ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production's sake. . . . Moreover, the development of capitalist production makes it constantly necessary to keep increasing the amount of the capital laid out in a given industrial undertaking, and competition makes the immanent laws of capitalist production to be felt by each individual capitalist, as external coercive laws. It compels him to keep constantly extending his capital, in order to preserve it, but extend it he cannot, except by means of progressive accumulations. . . . To accumulate, is to conquer the world of social wealth, to increase the mass of human beings exploited by him, and thus to extend both the direct and the indirect sway of the capitalist. (p. 17)'

Of course, some of the blame for the retreat from class and class struggle on the part of many neo-Gramscians has to lie with the cultural studies exponents of Gramsci (1971), including Hall himself, and the way that Gramsci's notion of hegemony has been retranslated.

Fabiana Woodfin (2005) has undertaken an important analysis of Gramsci's work in terms of how it has been taken up and retranslated by cultural studies theorists and other "self-affirmed post-Marxists" in Europe and the United States. Woodfin's analysis focuses on the centrality of translation practices to ways of conceiving social change. According to Woodfin, the appropriation of Gramsci has often served the ironic purpose of arguing against Marx, a tendency that has produced a disturbing paradox within the field: on one hand, stalking the horizon of cultural studies are the neo-Marxist "culturalists" who, under Hall's lead, applaud Gramsci for his supposedly lack of emphasis on social determinism viz-a-viz class; on the other, there are the hardliner post-Marxists, such as Laclau and Mouffe, who criticize Gramsci for having been too preoccupied with issues of class. According to Woodfin,

'the former impose the concept of "articulation" between base and superstructure so that culture and politics may finally divorce economy, while the latter find political-economic considerations of the superstructure as "economistic" and no longer appropriate in post-industrial capitalist societies. Both ultimately encourage a cultural determinism that is just as insidious and politically paralyzing as its economic variant. Both dismiss Marxism as passé.'

Woodfin (2005) initiates a critical translation practice of Gramsci's work that problematizes the "essentializing reduction of the diversity within Marxist theory" by Hall, Laclau, and others through a recontextualization of Gramsci's work that reveals "the continuing relevance of Marxism for informing a critical political

practice that need not be—and indeed was not always—economistic or deterministic.”

Woodfin (2005) traces the problem to the dispute within British cultural studies over how to best reengage with the Marxist tradition. In a belated response to the challenge of E.P. Thompson to reintroduce Marxism into an understanding of culture, Raymond Williams famously put forward the proposition that social being determines consciousness as a replacement for the mechanical base-determines-superstructure model, a move that, according to Woodfin, set the stage for the introduction of Gramsci into the project of British cultural studies.

Struggle was put at the center of cultural inquiry, whereas culture was redefined as a “whole way of struggle.” But this “break into Marxism” that set the stage for Gramsci was short lived and, thanks to the work of Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and others, culminated in its opposite: a break out of Marxism (Woodfin, 2005).

Hall’s (1996) attempt to intervene into the structuralism-culturalism dispute, a dispute that was famously framed by the Thompson/Williams debate but regrettably reduced by Hall into a conflict between crude economic reductionism and naive idealist humanism, included an outright rejection of the base-superstructure model (Woodfin, 2005). Woodfin describes how, through such a move, Hall positioned his project against Marxism rather than as an argument for the continuing relevance of a Marxism that exists beyond deterministic and economistic models. Rather than seeing the outcome of the Williams/Thompson debate in terms of a renewal of Marx’s “being versus consciousness” dialectic, Hall rewrote the culturalist-structuralist dispute as the defining break away from Marxism. Woodfin draws our attention to the example of Hall’s use of the term *articulation* (which Hall borrowed from Ernesto Laclau), which stresses the contingent and non-necessary aspects of ideological elements and the relationship between ideological elements and social forces and also between different social groups within a particular social movement. Here, Woodfin (2005) describes Hall’s use of the term *articulation* as representing “no less than a disjoining of the two dialectical antipodes of Marxism, whether one wishes to view it as base and superstructure, as being and consciousness, or as structure and experience.”

Our use of Gramsci (1971) acknowledges the strategic centrality of class struggle in his work. We argue for a counterhegemonic coalition of social formations comprising committed intellectuals whose political bonds are interconnected and articulated through the unification of demands in heterogeneous, multifaceted, yet focalized anticapitalist struggles. This is not to limit counterhegemonic struggles to the productivist framework of unilinear labor struggles or Marxist “workerism,” for

instance, but rather to forge by means of a unified subaltern historical bloc new bonds between labor and new social movements without dismissing the potential of politically unorganized social sectors, such as the growing numbers of unemployed and homeless (Brosio, 1994).

One of the main goals of these diverse coalitions should be to suffocate the authoritarian power of the state and curb its ability to support other structures of oppression. To do so demands moving beyond localized radical struggles and the creation of networks of micropolitical struggles. This does not mean we reject community-based multiform politics, but rather stress the need to coordinate our single-issue and micropolitical efforts so that the power of the state's apparatus is not underestimated and can be effectively challenged. Of course, we also acknowledge that the state is not the all-encompassing and indomitable structure of domination that orthodox Marxists have often claimed, as there exist fault lines than enable challenges from below. But we also recognize that state formations, whereas more fluid in the context of global markets and the internationalization of capital, have not become obsolete. In fact, they are functionally necessary to promote the reproduction of capitalist social relations and their transnational expansion. Although we agree with Boggs (1993) that a reconstituted definition of the organic intellectual emphasizes transnational social movements that are not necessarily linked to social identity or class formation, we worry that such a dialectical movement between intellectuals and social forces or movements is insufficiently powerful, at present, to overturn the highly integrated power structures of global capitalism associated with the economic exploitation of the masses, ecological genocide, and bureaucratic domination.

And although we agree that economic and cultural relations can be—and often are—decoupled within capitalist society so that they appear to have an autonomous or semiautonomous existence outside of capitalist productive relations, we cannot maintain strongly enough that objective surplus labor grounds both cultural practices and social institutions. A focus on capitalist consumption and circulation does appear to segregate cultural formations and commodity relations from class antagonisms and to sever the practice of exploitation from that of consumption as a matter of personal choice or taste or preference or even lifestyle. We believe, however, the labor/capitalist dynamic at the point of production is what needs to be foregrounded. Here, we follow Hoffman (1984) in warning against a mechanical slicing apart of the Gramscian couplet of coercion and consent, as all political action must be premised on the idea of the coercive character of all relationships involving labor and capital. Failure to foreground the role of relations of production in explaining the dynamics of consent and coercion has led many post-Marxist or postmodernist scholars who champion the new social movements to overemphasize contingency and the reversibility of cultural practices at the level



of the individual at the expense of challenging the structural determinations and productive forces of capital, its laws of motion, and its value form of labor. In effect, such a move replaces an undialectical theory of economic determination with a poststructuralist theory of cultural determination.

Post-Marxist or postmodernist critics do not see consent as a moment conceived within social coercion and brought about by productive practices (leading to the current crisis of overproduction in which higher levels of productivity has made capitalist accumulation more difficult to maintain). In contrast, the committed intellectual recognizes that so-called autonomous acts of consent are always already rooted in the coercive relationships of the realm of necessity (i.e., the labor-capital dialectic). Because coercion is the “ethical expression of the fact that people *have to produce*” (Hoffman, 1984, p. 212), it makes sense to view the dialectical relationship between coercion and consent as a dialectical unity. Hoffman (1984) asserts that “consent has to respond to coercion in order to ‘negate’ it. We have to avoid . . . a fatalistic social determinism . . . and a voluntaristic postulation of situations in which ‘social pressures are non-existent’” (p. 210). Without acknowledging coercion as such, we are faced with a pedagogy grounded in antipolitics of free-floating critique. To borrow a description from Carroll and Ratner (1994), “politics becomes an anything-goes adventure—as exhilarating as it is strategically rudderless” (p. 14). Such politics renarrates class struggle against economic exploitation and between exploiters and the exploited as cultural struggles against dominant discourses of the ‘haves’ against those of the ‘have nots.’ This has the effect of camouflaging continuing efforts by the capitalist state to subsidize the wealthy few at the expense of the many and disguising in cultural garb the reality of class exploitation as the unmet needs of the majority. This is precisely the problem with those who advocate a “radical democracy” and who are preoccupied with formal equality of political rights but who refuse to challenge the value form of labor and property rights that form the foundation on which political rights are built.

Our position has some relevance for discussing the issue of race. For instance, by separating race and racism from the social relations of production and treating them mainly as issues of ethnicity and the politics of difference and diversity, the multiculturalist problematic operates effectively as a hegemonic scheme of peacefully managing the crisis of race, ethnicity, gender, and labor in countries such as the United States, a way of neutralizing the perennial conflicts in the system, of containing diversity in a common grid, of selling diversity to preserve the ethnocentric paradigm of commodity relations that structure the experience of life worlds within globalizing capitalism. According to E. San Juan (2004, 2005), an understanding of the hegemony of the United States as a racial polity must begin with a historical materialist approach grounded in the labor/capital dialectic, where

class is seen as an antagonistic relation between labor and capital and where race is understood historically as a manifestation of the class-conflicted structure of capitalism and its political/ ideological/judicial process of class rule (San Juan, 2004, 2005).

### **Points of Departure V: Committed Intellectuals and Critical Pedagogies**

We wish to expand on the role of the organic intellectual by suggesting that the resisting, hegemonized, and fragmented subaltern needs to function not as a critically superconscious “organic intellectual” but as a committed one (Fischman, 1998). The committed intellectual is sometimes critically self conscious and actively engaged but at other times is confused or even unaware of his or her limitations or capacities to be an active proponent of social change. Or as Paulo Freire (1989) has noted, “conscientization is not exactly the starting point of commitment. Conscientization is more of a product of commitment. I do not have to be already critically self-conscious in order to struggle. By struggling I become conscious/aware” (p. 46).

Critical consciousness always implies that the subject has some awareness of the immediate world that concerns him or her. As Freire (1989) came to recognize, a deep understanding of the complex processes of oppression and domination is not enough to guarantee personal or collective praxis. What must serve as the genesis of such an understanding is an unwavering commitment to the struggle against injustice. Only by developing an understanding that is born of a commitment to social justice can such an understanding lead to the type of conscientization necessary to challenge the hegemonic structures of domination and exploitation. The globalization of capital can be challenged and even defeated not simply by understanding its formation and disassembling operations but also by developing the will and the courage—the commitment—to struggle against it.

The committed intellectual is not someone who is interested only in resisting and defeating forms of cultural domination but rather someone for whom the end of all forms of exploitation is the focal point of his or her commitment to transform the world because, as Foucault (1980) has so famously indicated,

‘the essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticize the ideological contents supposedly linked to science or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people’s consciousness—or what’s in their heads—but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth. (p. 133)’

The problem with Foucault's formulation, in our view, is that his regime change for the production of truth puts too much stock in a diffuse theory of power, deemphasizing the role of the fundamental laws of motion of capital in shaping discursive regimes based on the relations of people to ownership of the means of production and the social division of labor and therefore neutralizing class as an economic category and rewriting it as a cultural or discursive identity.

The point is not to initiate a face-off between two equally dogmatic assertions—between advocates of structural determination (i.e., social determinations of race, class, gender, and sexuality) and proponents of universal contingency or between supporters of Marxist reflectionism and those who support a poststructuralist relativism (i.e. resistance to meaning as a result of an endless play of indeterminacy) or between vanguardists (who privilege the party over the self-activity of the proletariat) and antivanguardists (many who believe that alternatives to capital will arise automatically from the self-activity of the oppressed). These are, in our view, false alternatives. We believe that a better strategy is to develop a philosophy of praxis, that is, to work out a philosophically grounded vision of the future outside the precincts of capital's value form of labor (Hudis, 2004). One possible route would be to follow Gramsci's strategy of acquiring a critical understanding of hegemonic structures (civic, social, and state) that constrain human action within the debilitating labor-capital contradiction and value form of labor while at the same time emphasizing a commitment to revolutionary agency that will permit collective redefinitions of and strategies and tactics for social change (Carroll&Ratner, 1994).

Here, the committed intellectual distinguishes between philosophy and theory while attempting to integrate both into everyday praxis. Philosophy is appropriated without adopting the contemplative standpoint that defines much traditional theory. It does this by penetrating and grasping what Karel Kosik (1976, p. 1) calls the "thing itself." In other words, philosophy is positioned away from its traditional concern with inner life by bringing the ideas of mental and manual labor, and philosophy and reality together as a praxiological dimension of the committed intellectual as critical pedagogue. According to Peter Hudis (2004), philosophy "is distinct from theory in that it recognizes the profound relation between the subject and the world in seeking to grasp the 'thing itself.'" By "thing itself," Hudis refers, like Kosik, to "not only . . . external objects but also to the categories which underlay human cognition." He goes on to say that

'philosophy is different from theory as it is traditionally understood in that it does not take its premises for granted. Philosophy is not about "accepting" certain fixed truths which one then simply projects without

further self-examination. Philosophy subjects everything to self-examination, even its own premises—not for the sake of just tearing things down (that would be sophistry) but as part of creating something new.’

Hudis (2004) reminds us that although philosophy is a qualitatively superior form of cognition, it doesn’t mean that we dispense with theory. This is because the practice of philosophy means taking part in rigorous theoretical debate and discussion. Because only through theoretic work can philosophical conclusions be adequately justified. But theory is, in itself, insufficient. In fact, what is necessary, according to Hudis, is a Marxist humanism that stipulates a qualitatively new approach that fuses theory and philosophy so that “thought ceases to take its premises for granted” (Hudis, 2004). Although we continue to justify our philosophical conclusions theoretically, we need to understand that cognition is not only about using theory to justify certain assumptions and claims—those must continue to be critically examined. A critical fusion of theory and philosophy prevents fixed conclusions from being projected by holding onto certain assumptions. Ideas themselves must, after all, be developed to their logical conclusion. Marxist humanist philosophers, however, are able to redefine the image of thought as the way that we think. Hudis asserts how Marxist humanist philosophy and its fusion of theory and philosophy is able to free thought “from a contemplative or formalist relation to reality by posing the reunification of mental and manual abilities in the individual.” Here, philosophy and theory as they are joined together in a manner that enables their unity to permeate our very mode of being in all facets of our existence (in a manner that is faithful to Hegel’s absolute method) are interpenetrated by voices from below enabling at the same time theory and practice to be concretized in each living individual. This gives each and every individual the capacity to become philosophers and to exercise such a capacity in the interest of understanding the meaning of contemporary life in order to change it. Here, theory and practice are not formally opposed but are unified and concretized in living and breathing individuals of history.

The committed intellectual recognizes that self-reflexivity or the capacity to engage in critical self-consciousness is not enough to resist both the repressive and integrative functions of hegemony. What is necessary is to find ways to actively intervene in the capitalist world order in ways that have the potential to transform that world. In other words, the committed intellectual works in diverse space and spheres in which new social movements intersect with more organically traditionalist socialist movements. What links the two groups of intellectuals is a common commitment to anticapitalist struggle and a provisional model of socialist democracy. As Brosio (1994) warns,

‘the fact that working-class consciousness has not yet overcome this hegemony in the West causes one to think that becoming aware may not be enough, when one considers the advances which have been made by capital in its colonization of the quotidian, lived experiences of the masses since the time in which Gramsci wrote. Moreover, there are many persons in Gramsci’s native country and elsewhere who understand the nature of their sophisticated oppression, but are unable to muster the power to stop it and finally overcome it. (p. 50)’

The figure of the committed intellectual that we are developing never forgets that we live in a world of messy material relations that is part of the consolidation of a world market of expanding profits for the capitalist class. This material reality not only structures our consciousness and ferments our subjectivities into a colorless and odorless pulque but continually exploits human labor and strips people who are located in subaltern economic, social, and cultural positions of their fundamental humanity and self-worth (McLaren, in press). Exploitation not only alienates, it also destroys. It forces people to work and live in dangerous workplace environments; pollutes the earth with toxic, life-threatening chemicals; and teaches people that indignity and poverty are natural and unchangeable situations. It naturalizes wage labor and the private accumulation of profit and legitimizes the social division of labor within capitalist societies. It subjects workers to the selling of their only commodity, their labor power, to survive. At the same time, the committed intellectual supports the resistance and transformation of capitalist social relations by means of the collectivity of labor (both local and global but always united) struggling to abolish the private ownership of the instruments of labor and collectively producing them in the interests of all.

The committed intellectual does not view hegemonic or dominant discourses as seamless but rather views all discourses as fundamentally contradictory and conflictive; furthermore, discourses are never immune from the larger context of objective labor practices or regarded as disentangled from social relations arising from the history of productive labor. Recognizing that the international division of labor is refracted through race, class, and gender antagonisms, the committed intellectual confronts the capitalist world order with a race, class, and gender consciousness and a politics of respite and renewal. It does so without succumbing to essentialist positions or easy rhetorical discourses of good versus evil, populist nostalgia, possessive parochialism, or militant cultural particularism. At the same time, we continue to acknowledge the labor-capital antagonism as the most fundamental dialectical contradiction within capitalist society. On the issue of challenging exploitation from an ethics of persuasion, we agree with Ronald Glass’s (in press) eloquent advice:

‘While the task of countering these developments is daunting, there is also no doubt that organic intellectuals can clarify the moral landscape of politics and policy in order to articulate coherent programs that can forge alliances capable of resisting, challenging and overcoming hegemonic powers. However, as Paulo Freire reminded us, people’s readiness to listen and to see the moral truths of reality is not dependent on the rightness or force of ethical argument alone; the persuasive power of moral argument cannot achieve its effect when it is divorced from organizing and action. The needed resistance to the dominant norms of the current reform movement won’t be mobilized simply by making injustices or unfair practices evident through disclosures in popular electronic and print media, even though such channels are more helpful than publications in policy or scholarly outlets. After all, educational inequities and the harsh outcomes to be expected from present policies are already in plain sight, and not only for those suffering because of them. Since the wellsprings of action are obscure and bodily decisions both get shaped in habits and run ahead of conscious judgment, the most effective critiques of policy will likely emerge from concrete struggles for educational justice. (p. 2)’

To conclude, three main ideas have guided our attempt to use Gramsci’s and Freire’s potent ideas in our formulation of the committed intellectual. First, their work facilitates an understanding of how the regime of capital functions in the political/pedagogical processes of schooling through historically specific, class, racial, ethnic, and gender differentiations. Second, Freire and Gramsci are good examples of the figure of the committed intellectual we are trying to elaborate here (Borg et al., 2002, pp. 147-179). Their work on the contradictory aspects of ideological formations offer us the much-needed critical means to understand the dialectical nature of subjection not only in terms of capitalist exploitation but also in relation to other forms of oppression (mainly sexism and racism, which are, of course, intimately linked to class exploitation) such as found in the mystification of the very capitalist, sexist, and racist ideologies and social practices that naturalize, sustain, and define hegemonic systems of oppression. Finally, Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual and Freire’s teachings on conscientization (as well as Hudis’s focus on the unity of mental and manual labor through the unification of theory and philosophy) offer fecund points of departure for understanding the possibilities inherent in critical agency by providing contemporary educators with a foundation on which to construct a critical pedagogy for a socialist future. This is the crucial difference when contrasted with the most prevalent forms of critical pedagogy. A critical pedagogy that incorporates the role of the committed intellectual is one that concomitantly posits socialism as a viable historical alternative outside the social universe of capital, a pedagogy that unhesitatingly and unapologetically names its

vision as socialist and works unflaggingly toward its realization with the recognition that there are no ultimate guarantees of victory.

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*Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, Volume 5 Number 4, 2005 425-447*  
 DOI: 10.1177/1532708605279701, © 2005 Sage Publications

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**Course: Philosophy and Religion**

**18092, McLaren and Fischman, Organic Intellectuals, 2005**

10090 words